

The New "Middle-Class" Union

How the Recent "Outlaw" Strike Has Waked Up the American Public to Be Ready to Handle Public Utilities and Keep Food, Fuel and Transportation Lines Moving



"Hack" McGraw, Captain of the Princeton Football Eleven. With a bunch of Princeton men, he operated one of the railroad yards in Jersey City.

Strike—and the world strikes with you. Work—and you work alone.

BUT this humorous paraphrase of Ella Wheeler Wilcox's famous poem no longer seems to be true.

An irresponsible worker named John Grunski, who was not an official, and not even a member of any responsible and recognized labor union, started an "outlaw strike" which in less than three days spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, causing countless millions of dollars' damage and occasioning misery and suffering beyond computation.

This sudden national upset and all the consequent public annoyance was started not by reputable organized labor bodies, but in spite of and against the vigorous opposition of the union officials—and it has set the public to thinking as to what can be done to safeguard the American public from a repetition of this sort of thing which next time might prove much more serious.

Chauncey M. Depew, the distinguished former United States Senator from New York, proposed a remedy in these words: "No section, no class, no occupation, can be permitted to prevent the men and women in the other occupations from exercising their functions; and the only way to stop that is to have a new union, a new union of the middle-class men and the middle-class women of this country, who constitute 80 or 90 per cent of our population. Let the millions of this great middle class form a union which shall declare that all classes must be treated fairly, squarely, rightly, justly and righteously."

What Mr. Depew has put forward as an idea has simultaneously sprung into actual being in a hundred different localities and in varying and different ways.

It was the student body of Princeton University which was the first to suggest that the public should help itself to escape the inconvenience and financial loss which the outlaw strike was causing. The students of Princeton offered their services to the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad to man switches, fire locomotives, operate locomotives and fill any of the vacancies vitally necessary to keep the trains moving. Here was a considerable man-power of some 1,500 able-bodied young men in the prime of life, backed by intelligence of a high order.

The president of the Pennsylvania Railroad accepted the services of the Princeton students and they began manning the trains and attending the switches. Following their example, the Stevens Institute students offered their services and were set to work. Next day high schools and other institutions applied as volunteers and were accepted.

The example of the Princeton men was also followed by the soldiers of the American Legion and by business men in suburban towns, who performed a public service for their fellow townsmen by operating trains which provided a service to and from great cities.

Even the women of many communities arose to the occasion and volunteered for all sorts of work, which they performed with much skill.

And still another development of the recent outlaw strike was the formation in several towns of local vigilance committees. The citizens who formed the vigilance committees served notice on the outlaw strikers that they must either go to work or get out of town. The effect was immediate.

One interesting development was explained by Joseph Andrews, vice-president of the Bank of New York, who had been a volunteer worker on a special train, morning and night, from Tenafly, N. J. Stepping down from his engine, the banker said:

"Our girls are volunteering to learn how to operate telephone switchboards and to become telegraph operators, and still others are ready to learn the work necessary to keep in operation other public service utilities. In this way we hope to be able to meet effectively any radical outbreak that may in future threaten to tie up fuel or food supplies of the country. And what we are undertaking locally should be organized as a national protective move."

What the Citizens' Committee of Tenafly and Englewood were organizing, as explained by Mr. Andrews, was also being put into practical operation on very similar lines by the Mutual Welfare Association, of Nyack, N. Y. This association began to make similar plans for operating public utilities and public necessities in cases of any future similar tie-up.

It was a curious fact that among the women volunteers were girls who offered themselves for all sorts of service. Two young women begged for jobs as firemen on the Long Island Railroad. Miss Charlotte Emery volunteered and was accepted as a ticket taker in the Lackawanna Railroad station and stayed for several hours, morning and afternoon, during the rush season, punching tickets. She was a Smith College girl. Wellesley College girls also volunteered and did good service.

These men and women who took the places of the striking railroad men and prevented a well-nigh complete paralysis of the nation's transportation facilities were largely from the great middle class—the class which suffers most from industrial disturbances and which has heretofore, through lack of organization, been powerless to protect itself.

The activities of men, women and communities in the recent outlaw strike followed many of the things that were done some months ago in the British railway strike. The great strike of railway workers that paralyzed English commerce was broken only by the willingness which men and women of all classes of society showed in helping to operate the trains.

Not only was the strike broken, but the breaking of it gave a great impetus to the new Middle Classes Union in Great Britain. The inconvenience and expense to which everybody in England had been put furnished the strongest of arguments for joining an organization which aims to prevent inconvenience and injury to the public in industrial disputes.

"Did you have to walk during the strike?" read placards that were displayed everywhere. "Join the Middle Classes Union."

This union is now active throughout England and promises to prove a powerful force in bettering living conditions. It welcomes to its membership all classes of people who are not included either in organized labor or in organized capital—sailors, soldiers, ministers, stock brokers, bookkeepers, doctors, lawyers, architects, stenographers, artists, writers, shopkeepers, managers, etc.

Even peers and men of wealth are eligible to membership in the English Middle Classes Union owing to the fact that heavier taxation and money's shrinking purchasing power often bring them face to face with exactly the same difficulties as the salaried man.

"Let all classes be strong and there is peace in the land," says Kennedy Jones, a member of the British Parliament, in explaining the necessity for the middle classes to organize in self-defense. "Good will flourishes where self-respect abounds. But at the present stage of civilization, as



A Truckload of Women in Overalls, Ready for Anything They Were Assigned to.

society is constituted, there cannot be strength without organization.

"Organized labor and organized capital when in dispute totally ignore the general community; they regard its interests simply as weapons for their own purposes, and they treat the middle classes as shields to protect their fighting men."

The inconvenience, suffering and losses the American public had to endure during the "outlaw strike" has given an impetus to the formation of a Middle Class Union in this country. The various mutual protective organizations such as sprung up over night in various New York suburban communities will form a nucleus for a nation-wide union that will include in its membership millions of men and women who are now so frequently caught between the opposing millstones of capital and labor.

Such a union would not be organized in a spirit of hostility either to capital or to labor. Its purpose would be solely to afford its members a means of preventing their being made the innocent victims of conflicts between capital and labor, as was the case during the "outlaw strike."

"We believe that the firemen are entitled to more money, but we must get to business." This was the placard carried on a number of the "indignation specials"



A Volunteer Who Operated the Levers in a Switch Tower.

which volunteer workers operated to and from New York.

The spirit of the proposed Middle Class Union would be much like that expressed by this placard. In any given dispute its sympathies might be with capital or with labor, but it would exert its vast power to prevent the public being made to suffer in the settlement of the quarrel.

Steps toward a Middle Classes' Union have already been taken by a number of New York men through the foundation of the "People's League of America."

"The chief purpose of the league," according to an official announcement, "is to organize the public and by so doing, to protect the public's interests."



Miss Charlotte Emery Took Tickets at the Lackawanna Station During the Rush Hour in the Morning, Then Came Over to New York and Did Her Shopping and Came Back to Her Post of Duty During the Afternoon Rush Hours.



One of the Women Volunteers on Duty in a Railroad Cab.

"In principle we oppose neither capital nor labor. Each has its rights. But we believe that in a democracy there should be no privileges. Our motto is, 'Fair play for all.'"

"We believe in law and order. We should see that both are fully respected by our paid public servants and by all private citizens."

"We are non-partisan. We think, first and last, of the public interest. We grind no axes."

"We hope to co-ordinate all useful existing groups, leagues and associations of citizens which have been formed already to assist the public cause, and we invite such bodies to join hands with us in fighting greed and oppression. We appeal especially to women, to law-abiding business men, farmers, clerks, store employees, teachers, writers, artists, ministers, doctors and salaried citizens generally."

When the "outlaw strike" began it was hinted that its real purpose was to hasten the formation of "one big union." Perhaps it will prove to have accomplished this very thing, but it will not be the sort of union the radical agitators have in mind. Instead, it will be a union such as is already gaining strength in England—a union which will safeguard the interests of all the millions of men and women who lie between organized labor on the one hand and organized capital on the other.